WORSHIP RESOURCES

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 (NIV)

Prayer of Invocation

Giver of life, we open ourselves - body, mind and spirit - to worship this day with an attitude of generosity and gratitude. We pray that faith, hope and love would fill us and our faith community, so that it carries into our neighborhoods and across the world which you so lovingly created. Indeed, let love be known in all that we say and do. In the name of the one who showed us what love is, the name of Jesus. Amen.

Responsive Reading

ONE: Love is patient,
MANY: but sometimes we want things to happen on our schedule.
ONE: Love is kind,
MANY: but we do not always show that in our actions towards others.
ONE: Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude,
MANY: but there are times when we are.
ONE: Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing,
MANY: but rejoices in truth and freedom.
ONE: Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures.
MANY: Our deepest desire is to do the same.
ONE: Love can be shown through our actions.
MANY: Love is resilient determination.
ONE: Love digs deeper.
MANY: Love gives more.
ONE: Love is made evident in big and small ways,
ALL: and the world is a better place.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Communion Prayer

God who abides with us and who comes to us in so many ways - through the prophets and the judges, through men and women through the ages, even through a still small voice. You sent us your Son, Jesus Christ, who showed us that even when we were not loved by the world, you loved us with an unyielding love. Then you sent your Spirit, the same one which hovered over creation and came at Pentecost in a new way, so that we might be empowered to love others as we have been loved.

Though we often see things dimly, as in a cloudy mirror, and we know only in part what you still have to reveal to us, love gathers us around the table. When all else seems unclear, we gather to remember the promise of Jesus-- that even when he seems to be gone from our midst, his love remains. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

Around the world, gifts given by this faith community to One Great Hour of Sharing weave together a tapestry of faith, hope, and love in action. We are grateful for the opportunity to change the world through our acts of kindness, large and small.

Maria von Trapp (whose story inspired The Sound of Music) once said, “It will be very interesting one day to follow the pattern of our life as it is spread out like a beautiful tapestry. As long as we live here, we see only the reverse side of the weaving, and very often the pattern, with its threads running wildly, doesn’t seem to make sense. Someday, however, we shall understand.”[1]

The tapestry we weave includes our being present with communities near or far, following various kinds of disasters, assisting communities with the resources they need to survive, or helping children with educational needs. Yet, we cannot be in all places needing our assistance ourselves or even see them with our own eyes; but through our generous gifts, we can show that love remains, in spite of all obstacles. Let us give, joyfully and generously, in that spirit.

Prayer of Dedication

We offer these gifts, O God, in the spirit of love. May the gifts that we offer this day embody our loving response to your great love for us. Through these gifts, may others feel the love of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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[1]Trapp, Maria Augusta. The Story of the Trapp Family Singers (William Morrow Paperbacks/HarperCollins, 2001), 83.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Sermon Starter

What does love look like for your congregation? Can love be given and received via Zoom or FaceTime, through a glass window, or behind a face covering? In a post-pandemic reality, we are rethinking what love feels and looks like, aren't we? Fortunately, Paul reminds us that while the delivery may be different, love remains the same.

Although we read parts of 1 Corinthians 13 at wedding and anniversary ceremonies, Paul wrote this letter to a church in crisis. All his work to bring people to Christ is on the verge of dissolving, and his pastoral work, done remotely, is unraveling.

The congregation at Corinth started well. Paul and his associates gathered a widely diverse group of people who committed themselves to living the life of Jesus Christ. They formed a community and focused on the common good. When Paul left them, the Corinthian congregation was growing and thriving. Then, things started to fall apart as the members reverted to old patterns: the community began honoring the rich over the poor, the religiously gifted over those gifted differently, the educated over the illiterate, men over women, and adults over children. In the early days, the Corinthians celebrated and embraced their diversity—each person valued for their uniqueness, each one's gifts celebrated as they all contributed to the whole. But now, their differences are problems. Paul calls for a return to love.

In Paul's encomium on love, he uses the Greek agape nine times to emphasize its importance to and for communal life. For him, love is an expression of commitment to a life in community; one that values each person and the gifts they bring. Every contributor is celebrated because they are now family— biology did not matter as much to Paul as the theology of community, church, and communion. His image of the Body of Christ emphasizes that each person, each part of the Body is vital, important, and necessary for the thriving of the whole. What does love look like for Paul? It is patient and gentle. It is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, selfish, irritable, or resentful—all the things the Corinthians were exhibiting! Christian unity was turning into Christian bickering—not the behavior expected of siblings in Christ. Paul's letter is a reminder to the folks at Corinth that God calls them to a better way—a way that is centered in love and results in unity while respecting differences; a way that sees in the other a kinship that transcends familial boundaries; a way that serves others from a place of love; a way that values others for who and what they are. The way that Paul points to is about faith and hope and love.

Howard Thurman grew up during the early 1900s in Daytona, Florida, where educational opportunities for Blacks were limited. There were only three high schools for Blacks in the entire state. The closest private church-related high school was in Jacksonville, about 90 miles away. His community pooled their resources to send him to further his education.

At the train station, Thurman learned he would have to pay extra to ship his rope-tied trunk, and he did not have the money. Alone and dejected, he sat on the steps of the rail station. A stranger, a Black man, asked why he was crying. After Thurman explained his situation, the man paid the extra fare. Before Thurman could thank him, the man walked away, and Thurman never saw him again. The dedication to his autobiography reads:

> To the stranger in the railroad station in Daytona Beach who restored my broken dream sixty-five years ago[2]

Thurman went on to become a renowned scholar and theologian and influenced the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. The stranger saw a young man in despair and his generosity made a difference—he expected nothing in return; he just saw a need and responded. The man may or may not have thought of his gift as an act of love, but it changed the trajectory of Thurman's life.

This is what One Great Hour of Sharing does for people across the planet—it restores broken dreams, resurrects hope, and carves a path into the future.

What does love look like for your congregation?

As you prepare to receive the One Great Hour of Sharing offering, recount for your church what love looks like in your context. Share how your gifts make a difference for neighbors near and far whose names you do not know and whom you may never meet.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the constant refrain has been "we will get through this—together!" That's what love looks like— people willing to share their resources to make the way easier for others—offering hope, kindness, and care. Agape is love that is rooted in concrete acts of compassion: helping to rebuild after hurricanes and tornadoes; teaching farming methods as the climate changes; providing chickens to stave off poverty; and, yes, even paying the fare for a stranger at a railroad station.

Through all kinds of weather, and even in the unknown, love remains– and love lived in community transforms the world.

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you help rebuild, renew, and restore. Your generosity means that through it all…love remains.

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[2] With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1979), dedication page, 24-25

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Children's Sermon

This children's moment illustrates some of the ways young people know and experience love as well as share it with others. It was constructed to be used in your own words or followed as a script. Feel free to adapt it to fit your setting and may further be adjusted for virtual or hybrid worship contexts.

Theme

One Great Hour of Sharing shows us what love is by helping others. There are many ways for us to experience love and to share that with others. Sometimes, we just need to think about love in new ways.

Materials needed

- An affirming listening ear, eager to engage children's ideas!
- Coinboxes to pass out to the children.
- Photo of Myanmar chicken feeding project

Script Suggestion

What does love look like?" (Give time for responses).

In one of the books of the Bible, a man by the name of Paul, we sometimes call him "Apostle Paul," wrote some ideas about this. He said that love is patient, kind, and is truth. He also says some things love is NOT: love is not rude or irritating and it does not do wrong to others.

Have you ever heard that? He even says that love never ends. Wow! Can you think of ways that you could be loving toward another person? Maybe in your family or at school? (Give time for responses).

One of the ways we can show love is to help others. Through a special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing, we have the chance to help people we may never meet. One of the projects we have helped make possible was rebuilding a school after it was destroyed by a hurricane. Doesn't that sound like love? Would you want someone to help rebuild your school if it was destroyed?

There's another way One Great Hour of Sharing has helped us show love to others, and I think it's really nice. In a country called Myanmar, our offering helps women buy chickens. They can sell the eggs to others so that they can have enough food to eat and provide for their families. Show the picture. Did you ever think you could love someone by giving them a chicken? Well, you can.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Next, pass out One Great Hour of Sharing coinboxes to children and families or arrange for them to be given out at an appropriate time.

You have a chance to show love to others through this offering, which you can collect through the next few weeks. Here is a special bank that will help you show love to others. At home, I'd like you to think about all the times you experience love. And with your family, maybe each night at dinner, or when you have breakfast, think and pray together about how you want to make a difference. Maybe you want to put in a coin or even a dollar for every time you feel loved. There is a Sharing Calendar here too that you can use with your family and your coin box.

I bet you can think of a lot of creative ways to help! It's a way of being mindful of all that we have, being grateful, and helping others.

Share any details about when your congregation will be receiving the offering, and when and how they should return the coinboxes.

Let's pray a blessing together over these banks and on the offering we will receive with them. What do we hope God will do? Allow for all their prayer requests. All prayers are welcome!

Very good! Let's pray: If you are comfortable doing so, incorporate the specific requests and wording offered by the children in your prayer with them. And/Or you may wish to use this prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for loving us so much and showing us how we can love others. Use the offerings we will put in these boxes to change someone's life. Help us love those we will never even meet. With thankful hearts, we pray. Amen.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Mission Moment Myanmar

Love is determined . . .

Daw Aye May is a 56-year-old widow who lives alone in the village of Sar Phyu Su, 40 miles north of Yangon, Myanmar. When she lost her husband in 2019, she thought her future was gone too. But she managed to maintain a living selling herbs at market. Then came COVID-19. Restrictions curtailed public gatherings at large markets and travel, disrupting an already limited economy by reducing farmers ability to sell products in distant and larger markets.

Although Daw Aye May received some additional support from family, she knew she needed to find another way to earn money when selling herbs was no longer a possibility. Soon she learned that One Great Hour of Sharing partners through Church World Service were sharing chickens with families who had great need and training them in animal care and husbandry.

Within weeks of picking up two hens and a rooster from a hatchery delivery truck, Daw Aye May had eggs! At first, "I didn't have any idea about how to raise chickens, but just wanted to try. I just fed the chickens and let all the eggs hatch," she said. In fact, she let the first 12 eggs hatch into young chicks. Shortly afterwards, she collected another 13 eggs from the first two hens and sold 10 eggs in the village to earn $1.81. That's nearly half the official daily minimum wage of $3.53. "I was so happy as this was my first time making money from my chicken raising business," she said proudly.

Local partners sourced a local breed of hens and roosters for villagers because they are easier to raise free-range style. In less than five months, Daw Aye May had 30 hens and five roosters – with no prior experience in raising poultry. "I learned that chicken meat from the local breed earns more money." She expects to soon gather 30 eggs per day, earning up to $5.42/day in sales within a cluster of walkable villages.

The newly inspired chicken farmer shared her joy and gratitude. "I thank CWS for sparking the light of a more hopeful future for me. Honestly, I wasn't initially interested in chicken raising. Now, I want to be a poultry business woman. With a flock of 35 hens and roosters already, I will expand the flock further. My plan is to collect and sell more eggs in neighboring villages where I am allowed to travel. Also, I will use chicken manure in my home-gardening as organic fertilizer."

Daw May Aye's determination is an inspiration to anyone who hears her story. Though it would have been understandable for her to give up, she found a way to not only survive, but thrive. This new beginning is made possible by the love you share through your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing! In a time that will forever be marked by the tragedy of a global pandemic, your determined generosity makes stories like Daw May Aye's possible, showing the world once again that, even amid our most difficult struggles, "faith, hope, and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love."

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Mission Moment Myanmar

Love is determined . . .

CWS Photo –